

St. Joseph News Press

March 9, 2008

Section: Local News

Group seeks better cooperation
Task force targets care of patients

By Erin Wisdom

In emergency medicine, minutes can make a life-and-death difference, and a Missouri task force is aiming to create a statewide system that would make the most of those minutes.

The Time Critical Diagnosis Task Force, made up of about 100 medical experts and leaders from across the state, is working to improve Missouri's emergency response system for victims of trauma, stroke and acute heart attacks. Bills in the Missouri Senate and House of Representatives would allow for establishing this improved system, said Dr. William Jermyn, the head of the task force and the emergency medical services director for the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services.

The task force's main goal, he said, is to increase communication between all of the people providing care for a patient — from 911 dispatchers to ambulance crews to hospital physicians — in order to ensure that a patient receives the right care in the right place at the right time. Task force members are working on how to accomplish this, he added.

"It is not unusual for someone who's had a stroke or a heart attack to be treated by 40 to 60 people," Dr. Jermyn said. "The interaction between all these people may not be as good as you'd like, and we want to get them talking better together."

The greatest effect this increased communication would have likely would be on the communities surrounding St. Joseph that aren't served by major hospitals, said Dr. Lynthia Andrews, an emergency medical physician at Heartland Health and a member of the task force.

"This system would provide transportation into Heartland in a more timely fashion," she said, adding that the system of improved communication would facilitate this by providing information to treating physicians as soon as possible, thereby allowing them to determine whether a patient needs to be transported to Heartland's trauma, stroke or heart attack centers immediately rather than receiving care at a medical facility that is closer but not as prepared to deal with severe injury.

In addition, this increased communication also would enable a hospital's staff to prepare for a patient while the ambulance is en route to the hospital, said Wally Patrick, a nurse in emergency medicine at Heartland and a member of the task force.

"All the pieces are there; it's just a matter of putting them in place," he said. "If we get this system in place, the state of Missouri will be much better off."